

"This was written by Jack for his family history files and should be read in this context. Jack has kindly allowed Rame Heritage to publish the document and we are most grateful as it gives a fascinating insight into life on the Rame Peninsula during the last 100 years"

MEMORIES OF MY KINGSAND AND CAWSAND by Jack Ford

My father having been invalided from the Royal Navy as a Petty Officer Seaman in 1914 was trained as a shoemaker and having become a widower in 1917 moved from Plymouth to Kingsand with his two children. It was in Kingsand where he set up his business and there met and married my mother Dorothy Jessie Smith at Maker in 1923.

As a child I recall the extensive use of the allotments of Andeditch above Victoria Park and below the Fort above Cawsand Square. In those days most people grew their own veg! There were daily visits of Farmer George Thomas of Coombe Farm with his horse drawn milk cart doling out measures into household jugs. Jovial Farmer Rex Carne and his cart with fresh vegetables and cream direct from Rame. Then there was the steam lorry and steam roller with the roadmen spreading tarmac by shovels- warmed on fires. The roads were narrow and many were tree lined.

The beaches were lined with many boats hauled out. Cawsand Bay was delightful with the many 'Bay Boats' moored off Penlee and with the beach slips festooned with rusty anchors. The beaches were covered with nets spread to dry and with the weeks washing fluttering on lines propped above. The Spillers, Marks, Andrews and Mays were the fishing families. There was a redolent smell of tarred hemp, fish, tar and paraffin oil.

I recall the five sewers on a Monday morning discharging cloudy currents of soapy water-Monday washday! together with the need to tread carefully on Girt beach at low tide with its proximity to the discharge of two pipes. The majority of the houses then were in active use by families with some housing more than one family!!

Mr Haddys buses ran through the village with inches to spare and provided a virtual door step service - the First village stop, the COWSHED at Coombe End. The friendly Drivers Eddy Hodge, Stan Cullis, Fred Hocking and Cecil Gilbert who seldom accepted my offered fare of 2d!

My father and mother lived with grandparents Smith at Strathdene in Fore Street - where I was born in 1924 (Photo 1)



Photo 1

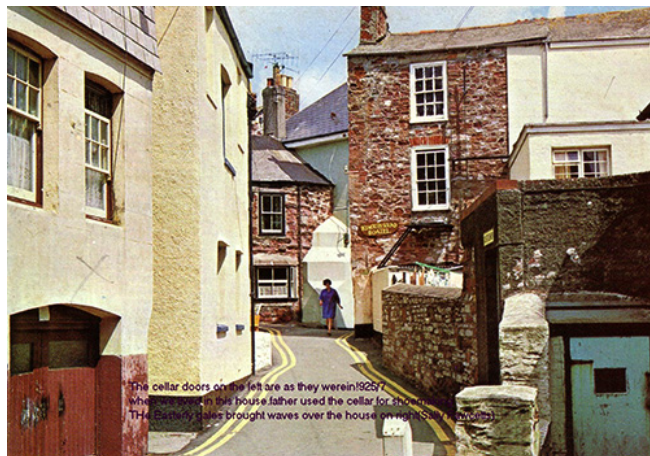


Photo 2

After a few years they moved to a house behind the Institute as shown on the left in the photograph (Photo 2)

It was here that father became village shoemaker for a number of years and I have my childhood recollections of raw leather skins - tanned and smooth one side -rough and fibrous the other. He worked with several size lasts held in a wooden post gripped between the knees. Soles and heels were nailed or sewn by hand - old holes filled with wooden plugs 1/32 inch in old English size. Triangular needles with waxed string - hot wax black or brown applied by a smooth iron heated on the stove - a constant tap - tap of the hammer and a smell of the hot wax.

In winter the Easterly gales brought waves over the house roof opposite Sally Fawcett's to flood our cellar. My schooling started from here at the old C of E School by the Slip in Garret Street. The beach level of this old pilchard Palace was open to Girt Beach below and was in use as a fisherman's store and boathouse.

Girt Beach was usually in full use by fishing boats with their nets drying and being repaired on the sand/shingle under the washing lines strung overhead on wooden props. I recall Pilchards being brought ashore and the belly spike which poisoned my finger but the major crop was whiting and mackerel. Fish and shellfish were plentiful. Strathdene rang to the sound of cracking claws when the crabs were boiled in the 'Copper' which otherwise on every Monday Morning was stoked early ready for the weeks wash. Sheets pillow cases, towels were all hand washed in zinc bathtubs on stands. Wringing by the hand turned Mangle was a tedious and demanding job with the washing then drying on lines in the yard. Ironing was undertaken by flat irons heated on the stove.

Wood gathering was a common task for many, either from wood washed ashore or from the woods in particular the Plantation by Devonport Hill (Dark trees) above Sandways (Hoe Lake) nearer Picklecombe and Fort-Seldom from Penlee which was the prerogative of "them over Cawsand" (Corsan - Dialect was strong Pre-war but was diluted rapidly by incomers).

Mushrooms after August thunderstorms, Chestnuts from Mount Edgcumbe Park, Sloes for the sloe Wine and gin!. Phosphorescence when night fishing - scratching our initials on the waterline paint of the Queen Mary-moored off the Breakwater (as little boys do!). Five years later she carried me and thousands like me at speed over the Atlantic- coated in her wartime grey to the airfields and shipyards of USA and Canada.

By 1930 life was more than a little difficult, the great slump meant a drastic shortage of work and so my brother Cecil, having had short time employment at the brickworks in Southdown and at Mount Edgcombe Gardens, took advantage of a Canadian Government scheme and was shipped off to Canada for farm work. He eventually worked at a brickworks in Brampton Ontario having married and raised eight children with his wife Louise. So my Canadian Trip to Yarmouth Nova Scotia in 1943 where our telegrapher air gunner's were being trained on Swordfish Aircraft gave me the opportunity of regaining contact with Cecil's family. This continues to Date via his daughter Joanne of George Town Ontario and a spreading number of Fords throughout Canada!

The pleasure boats of Mr Clod from the Barbican brought thousands of people during the summer-landing by gang plank on Kingsand beach, spreading along the rocks to Sandway and beyond. On summer evenings it was spectator time to watch them embark in orderly queues to return having dined on Mr Lentils fish and Chips at his shop in lower Market Street. We earned a copper or three ferrying ashore the boat crews who moored the pleasure boats offshore with one man on anchor watch until teatime when the return journeys commenced. We had no television in those days and watching people is always interesting!

The three beaches were thronged with local boats -sometimes with a bay boat (large sailing luggers) sitting on legs drying out as the tide fell -ready for repair or maintenance / attention of the shipwrights. French crabbers came into Cawsand and landed barrels ashore for a water supply by St Andrews Church. We sometimes went on

board to view the inbuilt well in the boats filled with fresh crabs and lobsters, occasionally bartering a sack of winkles for a small crab.

The village then was on the whole of darker more somber aspect, before the advent of multiple color washes and the eventual increased purchases of local homes by "foreigners" from far away places over the Tamar. Inevitable that this should happen but sad to see so many local families moving on! My village in childhood was a safe secure haven when most people knew everyone else and much of their business to!. A delightful place in which to grow up - a rock to clutch throughout life !

Grannie Smith supplemented her income at Strathdene by renting a front room to the Millbrook based Doctors DR Ridge-Jones and Dr Howard whose Brass Door plates I retain still -now unpolished!. The Front room was forever then referred to as the "Surgery". The Doctor held court every week with the patients lining up in the flag-stoned passageway, leaning on the thin wooden partitions awaiting their turn. Special elderly friends might be invited to sit in the kitchen. The Surgery furnished with a polished table, now in my bedroom, a rexine covered Sofa as an examination Couch with the waiting patients sometimes aware of the discussion on the other side of the thin wood panels. That Evening a wicker basket would arrive on the bus from Millbrook dispensary brought by one of the passengers to the door full of bottles of coloured red , green or brown fluid - Epipicuana springs to mind!. The evening was spent answering the door to callers for their medicine and so we came to know many of the village folk and their ailments!.

On a Sunday evening Grannie would receive a visit from her younger sister Edith Mary (Kent) then a widow living in Back Street. Edith would approach the Rising Sun and quickly slip into the " bottle and jug" (a small one person compartment with a tiny hatch to the bar servery) with a jug carefully concealed within her coat. Sid Jenkins the landlord would fill the jug with Ale. In those pre-war days few women entered public houses -except perhaps to the Snug with husband. Generally women were not welcomed in the bar -the War changed that and the two sisters would then spend the evening supping mulled ale. This was heated by a Poker in the fire cooled in the Ale!.

On our outer wall was a Lamp bracket for the oil street lights - I believe one still exists by the lower entrance to the Woodlands opposite what was Mr Southern's Butchers Shop. Oil Lamps and candles were common in the house until we had "the electric" installed on 24th March 1938. I have the original bill for Strathdene £7 and 15 Shillings for a minimum of one bulb in each room with a 5 amp plug in the kitchen for a kettle-very modern. Grandad Smith would never use this new invention and continued until his death in 1948 to go upstairs with his candle. Grandson Nic has one of the candlesticks. I believe cooking was by the two black stoves in our two kitchens - faithfully black-lead polished. Both were used at Christmas when up to 14 persons might be cooked for and using even the two attics for sleeping. All good family fun! Heating was by open coal fire supplemented by logs from the woods -not in the bedrooms unless someone was really ill! Windows were draughty, bedding deep flock mattresses, plenty of blankets, feather pillows and bolsters. Chamber pots were under the beds, washstands with jug and bowl for the women upstairs and outside tap or bowl downstairs for the men. There was an outside toilet in the yard - one learned to cough politely to indicate occupancy!

As a child the public hand pumps for fresh water were outside Endsleigh house, Victoria park and on the pavement at the junction of Little lane and Fore Street. A stream must flow under Victoria park down Fore street-possibly draining down from Andeditch. The pumps removed prior to 1939.

Bathing weekly in front of the fire in zinc coated tubs with hot water from the Copper. Coal came in the front door to two "coal Cellars "under the twin staircases. Strathdene was originally built to house two families each with two ground floor rooms, kitchen and scullery- each had two bedrooms above and an attic accessed by the individual staircases. When Grandfather bought the house about 1919 the dividing wooden partition on the first floor was removed and so it became a four bedroom house with four ground floor rooms, two sculleries, two

kitchens and two attics. I modernised it in 1989 to include inside toilet and bathroom. Auntie Beat was the final family occupier until 1988 except when I inherited we used it for a few years as a second home.

Strange now to think of all the folks who lived and died in the house. There could be ghosts! But they would be the warm friendly loving people who sustained me from childhood and beyond!

Jack Ford
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